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**Republicans take issue with gas prices
Bono supports bill to up mileage mandates on cars and SUVs**

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WASHINGTON - To combat high gas prices, House Republicans are working on a number of bills ranging from removing the tariffs on ethanol to make the fuel additive cheaper to boosting mileage requirements on cars and SUVs.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee debated a bill late Wednesday that would ask the Transportation Department to raise mileage requirements on cars for the first time in decades.

The law that set mileage requirements on cars at 27.5 miles per gallon - Corporate Average Fuel Economy standard - was adopted in 1975.

The committee rejected a measure to raise mileage requirements on cars and SUVs to 33 mpg by 2015.

Rep. Mary Bono, R-Palm Springs, voted for that requirement.

"I think it is time that we challenge the auto industry to do better," she said. "We should not underestimate America's ingenuity to get our cars to this standard in a safe manner."

House Republicans are responding to consumer complaints about gas prices that were averaging \$2.89 a gallon Tuesday nationwide, and \$3.44 in Riverside County, according to the American Automobile Association.

A typical family with two cars will spend about \$1,260 more on gas this year - or \$100 per month - than last year, AAA estimated.

Bono also supports a measure to increase U.S. refining capacity and a move to require oil executives to testify in Congress about current high gas prices.

"They should be asked to (testify)," Bono said. "Either they can justify their high profits or not."

Still skeptical

Many Democrats are not sure that high gas prices are simply a supply-and-demand problem.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, said the Bush administration has adopted nearly all the proposals in its 2001 energy plan that helped the energy industry but

not consumers.

"Throughout this whole period, gas prices have increased," Waxman said. "I'm disappointed we haven't yet scheduled a hearing with oil company executives."

Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, who chairs the House Energy Committee, said he hadn't decided whether to try to force oil company chief executives to testify at a public hearing or whether doing so would make it harder to persuade them to build more refineries, which could lower prices.

The House also plans to take up other bills that could lower gas prices, he said, including: suspending the 54-cents-a-gallon tariff on imported ethanol to increase gas supplies; opening up coastal areas and Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling; and removing environmental restrictions to spur building of refineries.

Additionally, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., plans to offer a bill that would boost mileage requirements on cars and SUVs to 35 mpg by 2017.

This would save about 2.5 million barrels of oil a day by 2025 - the same amount as currently imported from the Middle East, she said, as well as cut down on greenhouse gases that lead to global warming.

"The time has come for Congress to take responsible action and do something about our addiction to oil," Feinstein said.

"We have the technology to raise the average fuel efficiency of all vehicles to 35 miles per gallon by model year 2017."